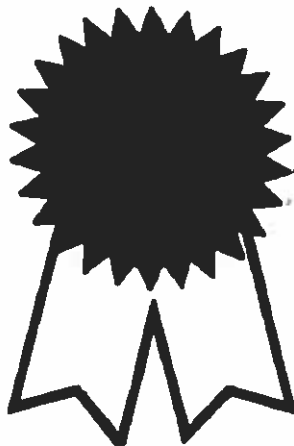
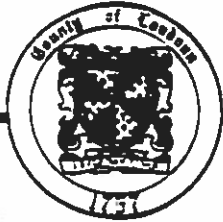


NO LONGER CAN WE BYDE OUR TIME



Report Of The Blue Ribbon Committee

**Presented to the
Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
September 4, 1990**



LOUDOUN COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Blue Ribbon Committee

18 North King Street, Leesburg, Virginia 22075-2891

August 31, 1990

The Honorable Betty W. Tatum
Chairman, Board of Supervisors
County of Loudoun
18 North King Street
Leesburg, Virginia 22075

Dear Ms. Tatum:

The eleven members of the Blue Ribbon Committee are pleased to submit their final report pursuant to your charge of February 27, 1990.

The report offers fifteen recommendations to make county government work better. These recommendations reflect the unanimous or almost unanimous agreement of the committee. We have not included recommendations that were supported by fewer than nine members even if they were endorsed by a clear majority of the committee.

With the exception of an additional recommendation concerning the advisability of adopting a charter, this final report differs only slightly from the committee's interim report. Shortly after the submission of the committee's interim report, the Board of Supervisors called for a referendum on the question of whether the chairman of the board should be elected by the voters at large. Regardless of the result of that referendum, the committee wants it to be clear that the chairman's power and authority should be enhanced. New language in this report makes that clear: The committee favors a popularly-elected, at-large chairman. But this position is independent of, and subordinate to, the need to strengthen the chairman's hand.

The committee has worked hard. Over the last six months, it has met thirteen times. Attendance has been near perfect.

In fulfilling your charge, the committee has heard testimony from many witnesses. It has conducted formal interviews with each of the members of the board, the county administrator, and the current and former county attorneys. The members have held informal discussions with many members of the community, looked over many pages of documents and reports, and observed the board and other governmental bodies at first hand.

The committee would like to thank those citizens and public officials who have given of their thoughts and time. The members also would like to thank the members of the board, Mr. Philip Bolen and his staff, and others who answered our questions and offered their counsel. The committee is indebted to Ms. Terrie Laycock for her outstanding service as executive secretary to the committee.

Yours very truly,

Robert M. de Voursney
Moderator

Introduction

The hallmark of Loudoun County today is change. New subdivisions, corporate office parks, and traffic mark a county that not too long ago was more noteworthy for its mountain ridges, farms and small towns. As late as 1960 the county was home to just 24,549 residents. Today, almost 90,000 people call Loudoun home, and by the year 2000 the county will have a population of more than 145,000.

The county government and the board of supervisors sit at the vortex of this change, charged with governing a county that is at once suburban and metropolitan, small town and rural. Inevitably, change gives rise to cleavages: between east and west; between "greens" and "grows;" between newcomers and old timers; between those who want more county services and those who prefer the *status quo*; between those who are willing to accept higher taxes and those who are not.

In Loudoun County, not too long ago, the board of supervisors could function as a part-time group of citizens who met a few hours a month to direct the day-to-day operations of county government.

But against the pressure of change, the practices that worked well in the past will not be equal to the exigencies of the future. Business as usual will not work. The quality of life that drew people to the county in the first place could be lost because of irreversible mistakes or a failure to come to grips with problems.

It is easy to find fault, to say that the county government has been too slow to change. But that overlooks the fact that governments, like people, find it hard to change. Just knowing what the problems really are is hard enough. Knowing what to do about them is even harder. And assembling the resources and political consensus to implement the solutions is harder still. The problems with Loudoun County's government are not unique. Most of the problems can be found in rapidly growing cities and counties across Virginia.

The changes that county government must make will have to be accompanied by shifts in public attitudes and expectations. The citizens of Loudoun County should not expect the kind of government that worked well a decade ago to meet the needs of the county as it enters the twenty-first century. Like it or not, the Loudoun County of the year 2000 will require a different kind of government, a larger, more costly, more formal, more professional government. The old structure many would prefer will, if not altered, simply not meet needs that are already apparent.

Fortunately, the county is blessed with ample resources. Despite the budget woes of the moment, its economy is strong. It has an affluent, energetic, well-educated citizenry. If county government can anticipate change and modify its procedures, it can help fashion a Loudoun County that preserves the best of the past amidst the change that is inevitable.

The Blue Ribbon Committee

The Blue Ribbon Committee was appointed by the board of supervisors on February 20, 1990 and received its charge from Chairman Betty W. Tatum and Vice Chairman Charles A. Bos at its initial meeting on February 27, 1990.

The committee is made up of eleven members (see Appendix A). Five of the members were selected as citizens at large. In addition, six organizations—the Bar Association, the Democratic and Republican parties, the League of Women Voters, the NAACP, and the Northern Virginia Community College—named a representative to serve on the committee.

The committee has met thirteen times for almost forty hours. The members have heard presentations from public officials and informed observers. The members have reviewed a stack of reports about Loudoun County government, local government in Virginia, and local government in the rest of the country; they have observed meetings of the board of supervisors and examined board agenda, minutes, and related materials. The members also conducted formal interviews with each of the members of the board, the county administrator, and the current and former county attorneys.

With the information the committee obtained, it used a three-step approach to framing its recommendations:

First, it moved to identify the most important problems surrounding the workings of Loudoun County government. After identifying a number of problems, it singled out the problems that it felt were most important.

Second, it developed, debated, and adopted solutions to each of the most important problems that it had identified.

Third, it reviewed and evaluated each of the possible solutions that the board of supervisors asked it to investigate. These possible solutions included:

- changing the current organizational form of government in Loudoun County,
- adopting one of the alternative forms of government available to Loudoun County (including other statutory forms or local charter),
- changing the number of election districts,
- having a full-time chairman,
- having any or all members serve full time,
- electing any or all members at large, and
- adopting a charter

Challenges

After informing themselves about county government, and before they began to develop their recommendations, the members of the committee sought to identify the major problems with the operations and institutions of county government.

The committee took this approach to ensure that any recommendations it might make did in fact address major problems within the county. It wanted to avoid proposing solutions to minor or nonexistent problems. It wanted to be clear about what problem each proposed reform was intended to solve.

Among the problems the committee identified, several stood out:

- how to overhaul the county's governmental machinery so it can deal with the complexities of a county that is making the transition from a rural to a metropolitan county;
- how to make it possible for the board of supervisors to get out in front of issues and lead;
- how to insert an articulated, county-wide perspective into the policy-making process while retaining the representation of the interests of individual districts;
- how to supply the board chairman with the authority needed to provide leadership for the board and the county; and
- how to equip a group of overworked, part-time citizen legislators with the information and staff resources to govern a changing county.

The committee recognized that responding to these challenges will not be simple, or easy, or without some cost. Tackling these problems will require determined and courageous action from elected officials and civic leaders and strong support from citizens.

The committee was aware that its recommendations—set forth in the pages that follow—do not constitute a one-time, permanent solution to the problems of Loudoun County government. Indeed, the committee believes that the flow of events itself makes it impossible for any one group to come up with abiding, comprehensive solutions to the problems of county government. The pace of change is such that the committee feels the structure of county government ought to be reexamined every four years.

The committee believes that the recommendations with fiscal implications should be implemented during the 1991-92 fiscal year. Recommendations without fiscal impacts should be implemented as soon as is practicable.

Meeting the Challenges

Meeting the challenges facing the county will require strengthening the institutions of county government beginning with governing body itself.

Recommendation I. The powers of the board chairman should be expanded, and the chairman's authority should be enhanced.

The board needs a chairman who has the power to lead. It needs a chair who is more than a figurehead, more than a first among equals. Although the members of the board may be reluctant to create a strong chair, the challenges facing the county call for strong leadership. The powers conferred by these recommendations do not grant the chairman any more formal power than is possessed by some other Virginia board chairmen and mayors. What is at issue is not the power of individuals, or offices, but the effectiveness of county government during a time of transition. If the supervisors do not strengthen the chairmanship, they may come face to face with pressures to ask the General Assembly to create an independently elected executive who would possess a veto and other legislative powers far beyond those conferred by these recommendations.

Specifically, the chairman should be given the following powers, resources, and responsibilities:

Recommendation Ia. At the first scheduled board meeting in January of each year, the chairman should be required to deliver a "state of the county" address in which he or she sets forth the legislative agenda for the board in the coming year.

Allowing the chairman to set forth the board's agenda for the year (and thereby define the county's and the board's priorities) should add to the chairman's overall capacity to lead the board. Also, having such an agenda should focus the board's energies.

Recommendation Ib. The chairman should establish the agenda for each board meeting.

Currently, the agenda for board meetings is prepared by the chairman, vice chairman, county administrator and his staff, and other board members. The chairman should have the sole responsibility, after consulting with others, for preparing the agenda for each board meeting. Reducing the county administrator's involvement in setting the agenda for the board would establish a cleaner separation between the board's role as policy maker and the administrator's role as chief administrative officer. It would free up the administrator to devote more time to overseeing the day-to-day operations of county government. Having control over scheduling would give the chair a powerful tool with which to lead the board; it also would focus responsibility for the board in the chair and would enable the chair to manage the board's calendar and workload. To protect against abuse of this power, any matter could be brought before the full board by a two-thirds vote of the members.

Recommendation Ic. The chairman should have annually at his or her disposal a fund of at least \$50,000 to spend on policy development and policy research as he or she chooses.

The chairman should have a fund that could be used to advance his or her own policy initiatives and to commission research to help the chairman define the major issues facing the county. The funds could be spent by the chair at his or her discretion to support the work of ad hoc citizen boards and commissions, engage consultants, commission studies, hire expert witnesses, and similar purposes. All moneys spent would be subject to audit, and the funds could not be used for personal or political purposes.

Recommendation Id. The chairman should have an allowance to hire a full-time staff member who would serve as executive secretary to the board, work on matters related to the board, and assist the chairman with his or her duties as head of the county government.

To exert the leadership the county requires, the chair will need help. The chair should be able to hire a full-time, senior aide who would serve as executive secretary to the board and help the chairman manage the board's work. This aide also would help the chairman carry out any other official duties associated with the chairmanship. Such a person should be hired by, and serve at the pleasure of, the chairman and would be in addition to the legislative aide the chair would be able to hire as a board member (see Recommendation III).

Providing the chairman with an executive secretary for the board should help avoid any need for the chairmanship to become officially full time.

Recommendation Ie. The chairman should appoint the chairmen and members of all board standing committees and board ad hoc committees.

Granting the chairman the sole power to pick the chairmen of the board's standing committees and to assign members to those committees would enhance the chairman's leadership of the full board.

Recommendation If. The chairman should appoint all members to ad hoc citizen advisory boards and commissions.

While the chair ought to seek advice from other board members before making any such appointments, the chair should have the sole authority to appoint members to ad hoc citizen boards and commissions. This authority would not extend to the school board or planning commission whose members would be chosen as they are now. Nor should it apply to permanent citizen committees of the county government (such as the Open Space Advisory Committee, the Library Board of Trustees, and the Economic Development Advisory Committee) whose members should continue to be selected according to present procedures. The chair should possess the same power as other board members to appoint members to these various bodies.

Recommendation Ig. The chairman should have discretion in referring items to the board's standing committees and/or to staff for further analysis and discussion.

The committees established under the invigorated committee system (see Recommendation IV) would have set jurisdictions, and in assigning matters to committees, the chairman would observe jurisdictional boundaries. Nevertheless, when an item could be assigned to more than one committee, it should be up to the chairman to assign it.

Recommendation Ih. The board chairman should be able to call items out of committee for consideration by the full board.

The chairman should have the power to call up items from committee for consideration by the full board with limited debate by the full board. This ability would allow the chairman to "fast-track" items needing quick consideration and to dispose of minor or noncontroversial items. To prevent abuse, approval of any item on the "fast-track" agenda should require a two-thirds majority of the board. This "fast-track" agenda would be in addition to the present consent agenda.

Recommendation Ii. The chairman should serve as an ex officio member of each standing committee of the board.

Shortage of time alone would keep the chair from becoming an active member of every board standing committee. However, the chairman should be able to be heard on, and to vote on, all of the issues being considered in committee.

Recommendation II calls for the at-large election of the board chairman. Although the power conferred by at-large election will be significant, by itself at-large election will not be enough. Without further powers, the at-large chairman may turn out to be a ceremonial leader from whom much is expected but who lacks the power to be effective. Without giving the chair extra powers, the end result of creating an at-large chair may be disappointment and disillusionment.

Recommendation II. The chairman of the board should be elected by the voters of the county at large.

A referendum will be held November 6, 1990, in which the voters of the county will decide whether the chairman of the board of supervisors should be elected by the voters of the county at large for a four-year term. The committee strongly endorses a yes-vote on this referendum.

Electing the chairman of the board of supervisors at large takes a big step toward solving two major problems: First, it gives the county an authoritative voice, one that speaks from a county-wide perspective. Second, it provides the county government with a real "top boss," a "master builder." Compared with the present means of selecting the chairman, at-large election would strengthen the chairman's leadership, thereby enabling the board to cope better with the problems of governing a county in transition and helping the board get out in front on issues.

A chairman elected county-wide would have a mandate from the voters. He or she would have a special base of authority from which to lead the county and to work with other board members and the county administration.

Selecting the board chairman at the ballot box would avoid one of the problems with the present system—the disabling and divisive situation that emerges when the members of the board cannot agree on one of their own members as chairman. It eliminates the possibility that the choice of a chairman becomes a popularity contest, or a political accommodation among board members.

If November's referendum question is answered affirmatively by a majority of the county's voters, an at-large chairman would be elected on November 5, 1991, and would take office on January 1, 1992. If the question is answered negatively by a majority of voters, the members of the board of supervisors would continue to pick a chair from among their ranks.

The committee wants it to be clear that the outcome of the referendum will not affect its other recommendations. These recommendations should be implemented in a timely way by the present and future boards regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

Recommendation III. Each member of the board of supervisors should be given an allowance to hire a full-time legislative aide. If need dictates, the board's present clerical pool should be enlarged.

The supervisors need help. Putting in thirty to fifty hours a week, each supervisor is working full time at what is not, and should not be, a full-time job. Board members are hard put just to keep up. There is little time for reading, research, or just quiet reflection. Lacking the time to look into matters on their own, the supervisors are forced to rely on the information they get from the county staff, lobbyists, and others.

While no one action will solve the problem, a major step can be taken by permitting each supervisor to hire a full-time legislative aide. Such an aide could handle constituent requests, do legislative research, or do clerical work. This extra pair of eyes, ears, and legs would be of invaluable help to a hard-pressed citizen legislator.

This allowance could not be used for any other purpose, and no supervisor would be forced to hire an aide.

The salaries for these aides would be an investment in effective government. If the county is not willing to supply staff for its part-time citizen board members, then being a supervisor should be viewed as a full-time job and paid accordingly.

Recommendation IV. The board of supervisors should strengthen, and make more effective use of, its standing committees.

A strengthened committee system could help the board handle the complex issues facing a county in transition. No member can delve fully into each of the issues coming before the board. The magnitude and complexity of the issues requires that the members of the board specialize. A strong committee system would encourage and take advantage of specialization. It would mobilize and develop the expertise of individual board members and be a point of input for expert resources within the county.

A strengthened committee system could help the board cope with a heavy workload by cutting down on the number of matters coming before the board for a full hearing and by reducing the time the full board spends on the matters it does consider. This would free the board to focus on the larger issues confronting the county. Even though they may require the formal approval of the full board, many matters—especially matters of minor importance—should be settled in committee. Most of the collection of information and testimony should take place in committee. The committees also should define, frame, and limit issues before they are taken up by the entire board.

To get the benefit of its committee system, the board should discipline itself to shift the effective decisions on many matters to its standing committees. The board should be predisposed to uphold standing committee recommendations when matters come up for a vote before the full board, and the “fast track” calendar and consent calendar should be used whenever possible. The full board should avoid hearing the same witnesses give the same testimony that was presented in committee. Matters should be kept in committee until the full board is able to cast a final vote.

The strengthened committee system called for in this recommendation should consist of five or more standing committees organized around major policy issues (e.g. transportation and public safety, environment and land use, education and social services) or areas of government activity (e.g. government operations and finance). Each such committee should have a defined jurisdiction and should screen proposals and exercise oversight over administrative agencies and programs. Each standing committee should be able to look to one or more senior members of the county administrative staff for information. No new administrative staff positions, however, should be created for the purpose of serving the board’s standing committees. To make sure that the committee system stays in tune with the county’s needs, each new board should review the number and jurisdictions of the board’s standing committees and make any changes that are needed.

Recommendation V. To ensure adequate oversight of county government, a sunset provision should be attached to every county program so that the program would go out of business unless it is reauthorized after a thorough review. The reviews that are conducted should be zero-based: that is, the entire rationale for the program and its budget should be questioned before it is reauthorized.

To govern a county in transition, every county agency and program must keep up with the county's needs and do the job it is supposed to do. To ensure that each county agency is up to speed requires that the board exercise oversight over the administrative arm of county government. To make sure that oversight is adequate, a sunset provision should be attached to each major program so that each program is scrutinized by one of the board's standing committees every four years outside of the annual budget process. In carrying out oversight, the board must be careful to restrict itself to evaluating whether agencies are doing what they are supposed to. The board should not fall into the trap of trying to manage the day-to-day operations of county government, or second guess the individual management decisions made by the administrator and county staff.

Recommendation VI. The board should review major elements of policy on a rotating multi-year schedule. Each major policy element should be reviewed at least once every five years.

Governing a county in transition is tough. Every issue seems to demand attention at once. Yet the issues are so significant and so complicated that trying to give proper study and attention to each one is impossible. Nothing seems to get studied in adequate depth. Work load becomes overload. Nothing ever seems to be settled. To consider too many major questions at the same time, as may be happening now, is to ensure that none is dealt with adequately and that the board and staff run themselves ragged.

To get through this difficult transition, Loudoun County government, and particularly the board of supervisors, needs to develop a multi-year schedule for reviewing major elements of public policy. Under such a schedule, the major pieces of policy such as the zoning and subdivision ordinances, the comprehensive plan, area management plans, major county facilities, and so on would be brought up for review at least every five years on a regular cycle. Such a schedule may mean that some important policy questions get put off. But that is the price the county will have to pay to make sure that the major issues facing the county are considered systematically and in depth.

Recommendation VII. The board chairman and members of the board should examine the board's work load and, consistent with the board's legal responsibilities, delegate or spin off minor matters to other bodies.

While it is hard pressed on many fronts, the board spends far too much time on trivia and on matters that ought to be decided elsewhere. The board's agenda are jam packed. Where it can, the board should shed minor, time consuming, agenda-clogging items. This may mean turning over minor planning approvals to the county staff. It may mean letting the planning commission have the last word on some matters. It may mean letting certain items be decided by a board standing committee.

For minor matters the board chooses to consider or has to consider by law, it should conduct only a brief and rapid review leaving the effective decision to others; such items should be brought up for approval on the "fast-track" calendar, or consent calendar.

The board's time, energy, and attention are precious. The board has all it can handle to address the big issues facing the county. It should not get bogged down in matters that have no important policy implications.

Recommendation VIII. The county should undertake an ongoing program of strategic planning staffed by a small strategic planning office that reports directly to the board.

Loudoun County has a choice: it can try to manage change, or it can let itself be managed by change. Like America's best managed corporations, the county should carry out an ongoing program of strategic planning. Such a program would monitor the changes that will affect the county; conduct an ongoing assessment of the county's strengths and weaknesses; look at the opportunities and threats facing the county; and design strategies to allow the county to realize the kind of future it wants.

Strategic planning differs from the land use planning carried out by the county planning department. Because strategic planning would deal with the major policy issues facing the county, the strategic planning office should report directly to the board, which is the chief policy-making body for the county.

Some Possible Reforms: An Evaluation

As the Blue Ribbon Committee took a hard look at ways to improve the county's governmental machinery, it had a number of possible changes to consider. Knowing that the county is going to have to be redistricted when the 1990 census figures become available, the board of supervisors asked the Blue Ribbon Committee to evaluate several such changes, some of which were discussed in the preceding section. The rest are reviewed below.

Recommendation IX. At this time, serving as chairman or as a member of the board of supervisors should not be regarded as a full-time job.

While service on the board has become virtually full-time, the ideal of the part-time, citizen legislator should not be abandoned. Instead, the burden of serving as a supervisor should be lightened. The board's procedures and operations should be streamlined; board members should be provided with legislative staff; and the board should shed minor duties.

Recommendation X. The members of the board of supervisors (with the exception of the chairman who should be elected at large) should be elected from single-member districts.

There are several ways to elect the members of the board of supervisors: elect all members at large; elect all members at large, but with district residence requirements; elect some members at large and some from districts; elect some, or all, members from multi-member districts; proportional representation; and elect all members (except the at-large chair) from single-member districts.

Electing all members (except the chairman) from single-member districts would keep most of the present system and would avoid the upheaval that would go along with any radical change. The system of single-member districts is clear, well understood, and workable. Combining the at-large election of the chairman with the election of the other members from single-member districts represents all areas of the county while adding a county-wide perspective in the person of the chair. Single-member districts make for a clear link between citizens and their representatives, thus providing clarity and accountability. Citizens know whom to call if they have a problem or complaint.

In contrast, if all board members were elected at large, all or most of the supervisors could come from one part of the county. Under most alternatives to the single-member district, electoral arithmetic would put the most populous areas of the county in the driver's seat. Under all of the alternatives, the personal connection between individual citizen and elected representative would be blurred. And, under three of the possible arrangements (at-large representation with district residence requirements, multi-member districts, and proportional representation), the election mechanics would be hard to understand.

Recommendation XI. Regardless of the number of members who serve on the board, the board should have an odd number of members.

Government by deadlock is unacceptable, and yet that is what the county invites when the board of supervisors has an even number of members. Having an odd number of members would **make** it much more likely that any matter coming before the board would be voted up or down.

Although only a handful of matters have come to a tie vote, the ones that have (such as the election of a chair in 1984, or the location of the county office complex) have been disruptive and time consuming. While a 4-4 tie vote fails to pass, the result is not decisive and represents government by stalemate.

Having an even number of board members also makes it harder for the board to act affirmatively than if the board had an odd number of members. An eight-member board, for example, will find a majority (five out of eight) only 36% of the time while either a seven- or a nine-member board will find a majority half the time.

Then too, because a motion receiving a tie vote fails, having an even number of members sets a higher threshold to pass a motion than the 50% threshold that is standard for most matters in most legislative bodies. On the current eight-member board, it takes five votes to pass a motion. That's the same number of votes that would be required to pass a motion if the board had nine members. In both cases the percent of members who have to vote yes to approve a motion is greater than 50%.

Recommendation XII. The board should have nine members (eight members, plus the chairman elected at large).

Virginia law permits a board of supervisors to have between three and eleven members. Among the options involving an odd number of members, a nine-member board (including an at-large chairman) makes the most sense:

- (coupled with single-member district election) it allows the county to retain each of the present magisterial districts (although the district lines will have to be redrawn when the results of the census become available);
- it would be the easiest to implement politically. A nine-member board would offer representation for the various areas of the county; the members themselves are likely to be more diverse than would be the case with a smaller board.
- with nine members, the board of supervisors would be big enough to have an active committee system. Assuming five, three-member standing committees, each member could serve on at least two standing committees.
- it would make it more likely that the membership of the board continues to be made up of part-time, citizen legislators.

If the November 6, 1990, referendum question on an at-large chairman fails to receive a majority of affirmative votes, the 1991 redistricting of the election districts in the county should create a ninth magisterial district.

Recommendation XIII. For the time being, the county should retain the offices of treasurer, commissioner of revenue, sheriff, clerk of circuit court, and commonwealth's attorney and should continue to fill those offices by popular election.

This is one area where "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." There is no need right now to make any structural change regarding the county's five constitutional offices. The day may come, however, when the efficient management of a metropolitan county makes it inadvisable to adhere to the present arrangement. In any event, the current system should be evaluated every four years to see whether a change is needed.

Recommendation XIV. At this time, Loudoun County should not adopt any of the optional or special forms of county government that are now (or may soon become) available to it under Virginia law.

Like eighty-four other counties in Virginia, Loudoun operates under the traditional form of county government. Under Virginia law, the county could adopt any one of three optional forms (the county board form used in Carroll, Russell, and Scott counties, the county manager form used in Henrico, and the county executive form used in Albemarle and Prince William). When census data indicates that the population of Loudoun County exceeds 90,000, the county could adopt a special form (the urban county executive form) used in Fairfax County.

These alternative forms, while each is slightly different, vary from the traditional form in three respects:

(1) all (except the county board form) replace the elected commissioner of revenue and treasurer with an appointed director of finance.

(2) some of these forms, particularly the county manager form, confer somewhat greater formal powers on the chief administrative officer; and

(3) each form prescribes an organizational structure for the county government stipulating that the county will create certain departments.

The committee decided to recommend against adopting one of these forms for six reasons:

First, the committee saw no need to make any change relating to the constitutional officers at this time—something that would be required under all but the county board form.

Second, whatever formal powers an optional or special form might confer on the administrator are outweighed by the other factors that determine the chemistry between the board and the administrator (e.g. personality, politics, conditions within the county). As long as the board hires and fires the administrator and sets the salary and other conditions under which the administrator works, the board has effective control. The prudent administrator—regardless of how much formal power or independence he or she enjoys—would consult with the board on major decisions and defer to the board's judgment.

Third, the traditional form appears to let a board informally delegate a great deal to an administrator. A county does not have to adopt a new form of government to give an administrator more authority. However, the board should draw a sharp and clear line of responsibility between the legislative, policy-making function of the board of supervisors and the administrative function of the administrator's office. The board should also establish well-defined areas of responsibility for legislating and policy setting on the one hand, and

the administration of the county's government on the other. To the extent it is possible, clear guidelines should be established by the board of supervisors concerning the need for direct access by members of the board of supervisors to administrative staff for information and status reports as needed by board members to function effectively.

Fourth, none of the organizational structures required under any of the alternative forms appears to offer any marked advantage for Loudoun County.

Fifth, of the available optional and special forms, just one—the urban county executive would create an independently elected board chairman, and that form would eliminate two constitutional officers.

Sixth, it was hard to see that any of the optional or special forms would solve any of the major problems facing Loudoun County.

When asked to rank the significance of the form of government on a scale of one to ten, one Northern Virginia county administrator replied emphatically that it was a zero.

Recommendation XV. At this time, Loudoun County should not seek to obtain a charter from the General Assembly. The arguments for operating under a charter, however, have sufficient merit that the question of whether to seek a charter should be reexamined by each board of supervisors at least once during its four-year term.

The organization and powers of Virginia's cities and towns are established by charters granted by the General Assembly. Since 1985 Virginia counties have had the authority to apply to the General Assembly for charters, and two counties—Chesterfield and Roanoke—now operate under charters.

For Loudoun County a charter may offer certain advantages over adopting one of the special or optional forms of government or staying with the traditional form. By obtaining a charter, the county could fashion a form of government customized to its own needs and circumstances. In contrast to the optional or special forms, the county could get a charter that retains any or all of the constitutional offices. In the event of a conflict between a charter provision and general law, charter provisions would be controlling unless the General Assembly has provided expressly that the general law in question should take precedence.

At this time in Loudoun County's affairs, when county government has its hands full, trying to draft a charter and get it adopted in Richmond could be divisive, expensive, and time consuming. Moreover, there is the nagging question of whether a change in the form of government—whether by charter or any other means—would make enough of a difference in the way the county operates to justify the effort and expense.

Nevertheless, the charter route has significant appeal. Each new board, at some time during its four-year term in office, should evaluate the advisability of applying for a charter.

Concluding Observations

Loudoun County's government faces enormous challenges. The growth that will see the population of the county double between 1980 and 2000 complicates what would be a tough job under less trying conditions.

There are no easy fixes that will make the problems go away. There are no buttons to push that will make Loudoun County government much more effective.

To the extent that the problems of Loudoun County government are due to growth or to basic divisions within the county, or to clashes of politics and personality, adjusting the governmental machinery will not do much.

This does not mean that the machinery is irrelevant. Far from it. Loudoun County government can work better. It is not time to trade in the old model, but it is time to overhaul the old model to make it work better. The basic form of government itself does not have to be replaced, but the existing institutions of county government need to be strengthened.

Sticking to the old days and the old ways will keep Loudoun from realizing the bright future that is within its grasp.

Appendix A

Members of The Blue Ribbon Committee

George L. Barton, IV
Hamilton

Betty Jane Beyer
Sterling

Ann M. Curley
Lovettsville

Mark Gurevitz
Lovettsville

John Lindeman
Leesburg

Charles Littleton
Sterling

William C. Mims
Sterling

James K. Rocks
Lucketts

Julien R. Schrenk
Waterford

Lou Etta Watkins
Leesburg

Dean S. Worcester
Leesburg

Appendix B

Individuals Making Presentations to the Committee

Catherine Ashby, Commissioner of Revenue, Loudoun County

Philip A. Bolen, County Administrator, Loudoun County

Kirby M. Bowers, Deputy County Administrator, Loudoun County

Anton S. Gardner, County Manager, Arlington County

Rozelle George, Demographics Planner, Loudoun County

Terry F. Holzheimer, Director of Economic Development, Loudoun County

J. Hamilton Lambert, County Executive, Fairfax County

C. Carroll Laycock, Jr., Chairman, Loudoun County School Board

Robert S. Noe, Jr., Vice President, Anden Corporation, former County Executive, Prince William County

Robert E. Palmer, Vice Chairman, Loudoun County Planning Commission

Frank Raflo, former member, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors

George W. Titus, Treasurer, Loudoun County

Charles L. Waddell, member, Senate of Virginia

Appendix C

Charge of the Blue Ribbon Committee

(Adopted by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors on February 20, 1990)

It shall be the general charge of the panel to review the current organizational form of government in Loudoun County. The panel should also review all options available to Loudoun County including other statutory forms or local charter. In addition, the panel should consider but not be limited to questions such as: How many districts should there be? Should there be a full-time chairman? Should any or all members be full-time? Should any or all members be elected at-large? Is this the time to address the issue of a change in the form of government? What about a charter? The panel is commissioned to study the options that are available and to make such recommendations to the Board of Supervisors as it deems appropriate in order to better address the future needs of Loudoun County. The panel is to be independent, but it should at a minimum interview all Board members, appropriate staff, constitutional officers, and appropriate state and local government institutions and agencies.

The panel's interim report should be completed by the end of June 1990 in order to allow sufficient time for Board review if recommendations are forthcoming requiring a referendum. The panel's final report is requested by September 1, 1990. Information pertinent to the subject in the County files will be made available to the panel if desired. The report is to be submitted to the Board of Supervisors and will be used by the Board for its consideration and possible future decisions.

Appendix D

Acknowledgement

At its final meeting, August 22, 1990, members of the Blue Ribbon Committee expressed a desire to place on record their appreciation to the committee moderator, Robert M. de Voursney.

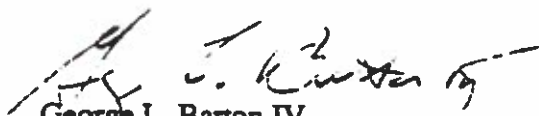
The committee is fully aware that Mr. de Voursney served without consultant's fees and that his work as moderator required extensive travel and research. While the committee completely appreciates this sacrifice, committee members also appreciate the manner in which he conducted all meetings.

It should be noted that unlike other citizen committees, the Blue Ribbon Committee functioned without a chairman, vice chairman and other officers and rules normally dictated by parliamentary procedure. As a result of this unique approach, committee members were able to focus all their energies on the task at hand instead of on internal committee procedure.

Throughout the committee's work, Mr. de Voursney kept a diverse and opinionated group "on track," reminding members of the restrictions of the committee's charge and suggesting procedures for accomplishing tasks at hand.

Throughout the committee's work, Mr. de Voursney ensured that meetings started and ended on time and that the overall timetable was met. He also ensured, along with county staff, that information requested by the committee was provided, and that both the interim and final reports were presented pursuant to the charges from the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors.

Because of his hard work, guidance, expertise and dedication, the members of the Blue Ribbon Committee wish this record of their appreciation to be a permanent part of their final report.


George L. Barton IV
Blue Ribbon Committee
Editor, Final Report